**BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Paul Phillips**

Paul Phillips was born in 1922 in a home on the corner of 6th Avenue and Hoʻolulu Street in Kaimukī, Oʻahu. His mother, Gussie Rosa Phillips, immigrated to Hawaiʻi from Madeira, Portugal. His father, Manuel Phillips, Jr. was the son of immigrants from San Miguel, Portugal.

Phillips attended Aliʻiolani Elementary School and graduated from Roosevelt High School in 1941. After working in a pineapple cannery for two months, he joined the Panalāʻau project in July, 1941. He replaced his older brother. Woody, on Jarvis Island. Woody had been a veteran of three expeditions, in 1939, 1940, and 1941, on Baker and Jarvis.

A colonist on Jarvis from July 1941, Paul Phillips was a member of the twenty-second expedition His group survived shelling from a Japanese submarine in the weeks following the Pearl Harbor attack. The four were eventually rescued, along with four Enderbury colonists, on February 9. 1942, more than two months after war began. Because of the delay in carrying out the rescue amidst the chaos of war, the men were dubbed "the forgotten eight." Their unheralded return marked the closing chapter of the project. They received neither official welcome nor government acknowledgment of their service.

Following military service in the Pacific during World War II, Phillips was an aviation officer for the Hawaiʻi Army National Guard. He retired in 1977.

Phillips has been an active and outspoken advocate for federal recognition of the accomplishments and sacrifices of the men and families of Hui Panalāʻau.

Tape Nos. 38-12-1-02 and 38-13-1-02

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Paul Phillips (PP)

Honolulu, Oʻahu

December 18, 2002

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) and Noelle Kahanu (NK)

WN: This is an interview with Paul Phillips for the Panalāʻau oral history project on December 18, 2002. We're at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, Oʻahu. The interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Noelle Kahanu. Paul Phillips was born in August, 1922 in Kaimukī, Oʻahu.

Tell me something about your parents.

PP: Well, my dad worked at Liberty House in downtown Honolulu. He was there for fifty years. My mother was a preschool teacher at the Central Union Church.

WN: What was your father's name?

PP: Manuel Phillips, Jr.

WN: Is he a second-generation Portuguese or third?

PP: (Second) generation. My mother [Gussie Rosa Phillips] was from Madeira, and my dad's (family) is from San Miguel.

WN: So your dad was with Liberty House for fifty years. What was he doing?

PP: He was in the men's furnishing department, and then a sometime buyer for Liberty House. That was when there was just one Liberty House in downtown Honolulu.

WN: What was it like in Kaimukī growing up as a kid? What did you do to have good fun over there?

PP: I think we had an advantage (over most kids of today). Money (and toys were) was scarce [during the] depression years. We made a lot of our own toys, made up games,

and played games that most of the children today have never heard of. *Oliwea, peewee,* these were some of the games we played. *Peewee* was a game made from a broomstick, cut into little pieces. Then we used another stick to hit the small one, and you could get points (if not caught). *Oliwea* was made with old Bull Durham tobacco bags stuffed with grass. Sometimes a little sand just to make it a little heavier. It was a matter of trying to hit the other guy before he hit you. Another game was "steal eggs." This was real great. You had two circles, maybe fifty feet apart. And had (three) rocks in (each circle). And the object was to get those rocks from your opponent's circle into your circle without being caught. Those games took up most of our time. We had a close-knit group where I lived. Quite a few of the boys were about my age. It was a wonderful time of my life.

WN: What nationality were they mostly?

PP: A little bit of everything. One of my dearest friends was George Morris. His mother was part Hawaiian; his dad was (Caucasian and) an engineer. We grew up [and went to] school [together] for about eight years. Then the family moved to the Mainland. Johnny Castello was (another close friend). (He later played bass) with the Richard Kauhi Quartet. He lived just a few homes from my place. Richard Kauhi lived (a few blocks away). One of my dearest friends was Eddie Yamaguchi. We started the first grade together at Ali'iōlani School (in Kaimukī). Went on through high school together, and still friends to this day. Real close, close friends. So there's a little bit of all nationalities.

WN: What kind of socioeconomic background did most of you come from?

PP: Well, I'm not sure exactly what you mean by . . .

WN: Did you consider yourself in the middle, poor?

PP: No, I would say probably below middle class. We are talking depression years, and are extremely fortunate that my dad was able to keep his job.

WN: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

PP: Well, I've got two older sisters. My brother Woody is older than I—I'm the youngest in the family. Woody is the one that kind of led the way for me down to the Line Islands. (I was his replacement on Jarvis Island in August 1941.)

WN: Tell me what your home life was like, in terms of discipline and some of the values that were instilled in you as a young child.

PP: When you speak of discipline, (I think I came in for most of it). My mother was (the verbal) disciplinarian. My dad never raised his voice at any time under any condition. If he said something, you did it. However, there's never any violent discipline, never. It

was just word of mouth and tone of voice. That was how we were disciplined. I think we had a wonderful family life. Of course, being the baby of the family, I guess I was spoiled. Most of the attention was focused on me, I guess. But I didn't mind.

(Laughter)

WN: What kinds of things did your dad or mom tell you in terms of how to live your life? Any life lessons that you remember learning?

PP: Well, that's a little difficult offhand. I'm trying to recall some of the things. Whatever we learned about life was from my mother. My dad very seldom ever got involved unless we went to Dad for advice and we got it. Otherwise, he almost never stepped in when Mother was talking to us. I'm trying to think of some of the things that might be of interest, we'll pass on that for a while.

WN: Tell me about your education.

PP: I started at Aliʻiōlani School in Kaimukī. From there, on to Roosevelt High School. At that time Roosevelt was six years, middle and high school. (I graduated in June 1941 and) intended to go on to college, but first wanted a break from school. Of course the war interfered and I never did get back to college. I did, however, (many years later, graduate from) the [U.S.] Army Commander General Staff College. That was it.

WN: When you were in high school, did you have any idea of what you wanted to be?

PP: No, not really. I was active in journalism. (I was a) member of the Quill and Scroll Society (and sports editor of the school paper, *Roughrider,* in 1940–1941). I was inclined to go to the University of Hawaiʻi and take up journalism. Of course, I never did fulfill that. But I keep thinking, "Why didn't you?" (Chuckles) Of course, it was the war. It took away from everything.

WN: Were you aware of the war while you were going to high school?

PP: No, there was no war on.

WN: I mean, what was going on in Europe.

PP: Oh, the war in Europe. You know, that wasn't much of a concern (to us at the time) because it was so far away. It didn't touch any of our lives, so it didn't really bother us. Volunteering to go down as a colonist (was no big deal) because, hey, that war is thousands of miles away. Nothing to worry about. Of course, we weren't aware of the political implications, the saber rattling that was going on in the Pacific at that time. Just thinking, maybe six months, nine months on the islands and I'd have a little cash in

hand to help my family if I were going to college. But unfortunately, the war interrupted that.

WN: Let's talk about it. You graduated from Roosevelt in June of 1941.

PP: Yeah.

WN: So what happened after that?

PP: I, like most high school students at that time, went to work for the pineapple canneries during the summer. Now, that was a big thing in those days. Forty-five cents an hour, that was big, big money for a kid out of high school. But to get a summer job was difficult at the pineapple canneries. There would be lines outside waiting at Dole [i.e., Hawaiian Pineapple Company, Ltd.], California Packing [Corporation], and some of those companies to get a job. Now, I was working at the California Packing [Corporation] when I got my call to go down to the Line Islands. I was there from June to about the middle of July 1941.

WN: What did you do at the cannery?

PP: I worked in the bran room. This was where the pineapple (remnants) were ground up, cooked with molasses, and put in hundred-pound gunny sacks. This was sold to ranchers for cattle feed. It was our job to stack it (in the warehouse). The bran is brought over from the main cannery to the warehouse on a high lift, then put on a conveyor to the top of the stack. It was our job to stack them. This was also good for training. The year before I did the same thing to get in good condition for football. All the guys who worked with me were classmates of mine from high school. So it made a real good fraternity there. That was it.

WN: Forty-five cents an hour.

PP: Forty-five cents an hour, big, big bucks. You got paid (in cash).

(Laughter)

WN: Could you keep all the money?

PP: No, I shared with my family. Some went into the bank. I think most of the money that I offered my mom ended up in my bank account. But I felt like the rest of the family, when you started to work, you helped. And that's the way it should be.

WN: So you were working in the cannery when you got the call, when you say, to go to the Line Islands. What do you mean by "the call"?

PP: Well, I had put in—volunteered, as a colonist following my brother Woody. The call was a letter from the [U.S.] Department of the Interior that I had been accepted as a colonist. I went down (on the twenty-second cruise) in July as a spare, an extra. Because of an injury to one of the colonists (on Howland Island who had to return, I was a replacement) on Jarvis, Jarvis Island.

NK: Actually, could you talk a little bit more about your brother's involvement in the project, and then how you got involved because he was already a colonist?

PP: Yes. I was fortunate. My older brother, Woody, who also graduated from Roosevelt, had been on three cruises: 1939, '40, and '41. Now, his involvement came about through my dad, and a conversation with a Judge Delbert Metzger. Now, what Judge Metzger's involvement with the Department of Interior, the coast guard, Bishop Museum, or Kamehameha Schools, I know not. But through Judge Metzger, my brother got involved (and of course I followed). Woody was on Jarvis Island when I went down and I was his replacement. He came back to go on to college at University of Chicago.

WN: What did Woody tell you about his experience?

PP: I think he really sold me on it. His first cruise (in 1939), made a stop in Samoa. The pictures and things that he brought back, I said, "This is the thing, boy." South seas, islands, cruises, and all this kind of good stuff. Of course, I was hoping that the cruise that I was on would make these stops. They did not. But there wasn't much really to tell as far as what (they did as colonists). You took weather reports. You cooked once every four days. Other than that, there wasn't much to tell. There wasn't much to do to tell about.

WN: Did he say anything about the purpose, why he was doing it?

PP: Yes. It was because of the air routes that were starting up between the West Coast and Australia, and they needed weather stations along the route. This is the reason the Department of Commerce, and then the Department of the Interior, gave for having colonists on these islands. Many years later, we found out (there were other reasons for) the colonization. But that was it.

WN: Did he make any link between the war that was going on, and the . . .

PP: None whatsoever. None. In fact, there wasn't a colonist, that I know of, who even associated war with the colonization. Nothing. There wasn't even mention of war until it actually happened.

WN: Can you tell us a little bit about Woody? What type of a person was he?

PP: Well, Woody is extremely meticulous. He had an eight-millimeter movie camera and took pictures of initiations aboard the ships, and some of the activities on the island. Everything he did had to be exact. I'm not quite (chuckles). I kind of like to round things off a little bit. But Woody was dedicated, absolutely dedicated, and he still is. When you ask for something, if it is not perfection, you're not going to get it. That's Woody. We're about the same size and build, weigh within two or three pounds of each other. Same features, but he's better looking. (WN laughs.)

WN: Now, he must have told you something that interested you in doing the same thing that he did.

PP: I think it was more of the challenge. Big brother has joined, why can't I do it? I can do anything he can do. That kind of attitude. Yes, the challenge, but also the adventure, and of course, hoping to stop at some of these other islands in the Pacific other than Howland, Baker, Enderbury, and Jarvis.

WN: His name is Manly Woodrow?

PP: No, Mannie. M-A-N-N-I-E. It's spelled wrong in the *Panalāʻau Memoirs*. Mannie Woodrow. Woodrow Wilson was president of the U.S. when my brother was born in 1918.

WN: When he [Wilson] was president.

PP: Yeah. So Woodrow. Of course, a name like Mannie, I don't blame him for using Woody.

(Laughter)

NK: Did you want to talk a little bit about Snoopy?

PP: Oh yeah. Well, my brother did two things that were contrary to Panalāʻau rules, if there were rules. One was he took our dog, a wirehaired terrier, down on this last cruise on Jarvis Island in 1941. The dog's name was Snoopy. This was before Schultz's Snoopy, *Peanuts* thing. We have pictures of both Woody and I on Jarvis Island with our dog Snoopy. How he was able to get the dog aboard the coast guard cutter I don't know. (Chuckles)

The other thing that he did, besides Snoopy, he took a .22 caliber bolt-action rifle down to Jarvis. He left that with me on Jarvis. There were no rats on Jarvis but field mice, thousands of field mice. It was just something that he felt that he had to do. So he took the rifle down (to help control the field mice). I'm sure the authorities knew that the rifle was there. I can understand not having it there, but he did and left it with me.

NK: Did you have any concerns on your part, when you talk about the potential tension of four guys living on an island together? When you were thinking about joining, were you worried at all that you'd have to get along with three other guys?

PP: Strangely enough, no. (It never really occurred to me), that being stuck on an island for three-and-a-half months with just three other guys (might create a problem). I can't recall a time that we got on each other's nerves to a point where any kind of violence [occurred]. Never, and I think this is wonderful.

NK: Now, did they have some sort of orientation so that you met the other guys that were at least on your cruise?

PP: Nope.

NK: Or was that the first time you ever laid eyes on them?

PP: When I reported to the *Roger B. Taney,* the coast guard cutter, I think at Pier 8, that was the first I knew of any of the colonists except Jimmy [James K.] Riley, who was a classmate of mine in school. But (you quickly form a fellowship). Richard Whaley and Elvin Mattson to Howland Island. On Baker Island, Blue Makua. On Enderbury, Jimmy Riley. (Mike McCorriston and I ended up on Jarvis). Melvin Paoa, a former colonist, was a guest on the twenty second cruise. He was extremely helpful in advising (the recruits) of the things to watch out for, things to do, things not to do on the island.

WN: Do you remember the kinds of things that he told you?

PP: No, not really. I probably wasn't even listening.

(Laughter)

PP: That age, hey, no one can tell you anything.

WN: So who were the Jarvis guys?

PP: Mike McCorriston was the leader. He's from Moloka'i. Henry Lee was the radio operator. Now Henry spent twenty-seven consecutive months on the islands. Every tour that he wanted to return [from], they couldn't find a replacement radio operator. So Henry would extend. [Henry Lee served on Baker, Howland, Canton, and Jarvis islands between July, 1938 and November, 1941.] He was an amateur radio operator, and had his set on Jarvis. We were able to talk to operators here on O'ahu. Kenny [Kenneth] Lum-King, I remember, and there were one or two others that would set up (a radio patch) with the families. Have the families over the house, and we'd be able to talk like on a telephone. It was one of those one-way conversations. You would have to say something, and then say, "Over." Then they have a chance to talk. It was wonderful to

hear from the family that way. Of course, when Henry Lee left [Jarvis] in (October) 1941, he took his ham radios with him. So all we had on the island was the government radio (for official communication). I'm pretty sure KF6JEG, was the call sign for the government radio on Jarvis. For some reason, that stuck all these years. Why, I don't know (chuckles). Then the other colonist with us was Ernest Renken. He had been down there before.

WN: These are the guys that you were there on the . . .

PP: On the first tour, yes. That was from August (to October 1941). Henry Lee and Mike McCorriston returned to Honolulu on the October cruise. They were replaced by Karl Jensen and Bernard Hall. Bernard Hall was the radio operator as well as island leader.

WN: You were also a part of this group?

PP: Yeah, I stayed on for two terms.

WN: How was the island leader selected?

PP: Well, primarily based on experience. They tried to select a leader (with maturity and) who had been on one or two previous tours. Bernard Hall (was kind of an exception. He) had never been down to the islands, but he was older than Karl Jensen, Ernest Renken, or myself. I was just eighteen years old and hardly (qualified to make decisions as ) a leader on an island of that type.

WN: When the Panalāʻau project first started, it was almost exclusively Kamehameha Schools students.

PP: Initially, yes.

WN: Were you aware of that, that there was a change somewhere along the line?

PP: No, not really. In fact, I had no idea when the project started. It was just one of those things, I was just following my brother. I didn't know the history of the Panalāʻau or what they did or why. I did know the first six colonists were Kamehameha School students, or graduates.

NK: Out of Henry Lee, Karl Jensen, McCorriston, Bernard Hall, and Ernest Renken, were they all local boys, too, from Hawaiʻi?

PP: Bernard Hall was not. Bernard Hall was from the Mainland. I am not sure where. I think one reason he was selected was that it was extremely difficult to get qualified radio operators. That was one of the big problems. But he was able to operate the government

radios which I knew nothing about. My job was outside taking care of the generator (and recording weather data). That was it.

WN: So you went on the *Roger B. Taney*, what was your first stop? Do you remember?

PP: Yep, [Howland] Island. This is where Henry Knell and Dominic Zagara (were injured while) filling hydrogen balloons for weather reports at night. The balloon had to be filled to a specific weight (with hydrogen) in order to ascend at a calculated speed to get wind velocity and directions. While they were filling the balloons with hydrogen, the balloon accidentally touched the gas lantern and exploded, and both of them were burnt pretty severely. Both returned on the cruise. That's the reason Dickie [Richard] Whaley and Elvin Mattson stayed on [Howland]. Then a day or two on each island to allow the coast guard to put their people ashore to perform maintenance on generators, radios, and the lighthouse. Then they move on to the next island.

Howland was where (the government) had built an emergency airstrip for Amelia Earhart. Howland was pretty well developed. They had nice buildings and grounds because of the preparation for [the arrival of] Amelia Earhart. From there, on to Baker Island (where Blue Makua was put ashore). Then on to Enderbury (where Jimmy Riley was the replacement. Then on to Jarvis where Mike McCorriston, Ernest Renken, and I were the replacements.)

WN: Did you get fairly close to these guys while you were on the ship?

PP: Yes. When I say yes, Jimmy Riley probably more than anyone else because we were classmates in high school. With Elvin Mattson and Dickie Whaley (we became friends on the few days of the cruise to Howland Island). Blue Makua and I were friends from our days on the beach in Waikīkī.

WN: Would you rather have been put on the island with Riley?

PP: I would have liked that, yes. But I'll tell you, it's extremely fortunate that I ended up with a leader on the island like Mike McCorriston.

NK: I know you want to talk about Mike a lot. Could we switch off?

PP: And switch the tape?

NK: Yeah.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, let's continue. You were talking about McCorriston.

PP: Mike McCorriston was from Moloka'i. When I say extremely fortunate, it's because I learned more from this man about nature, Hawaiiana, than I'll probably ever learn in my life. I'd done some free diving here, (but with Mike) I learned to make fish nets, learned to fish, learned the names of fish, and how to prepare fish. I learned to make feather *lei*, shell *lei*, and about Hawaiiana. Now, I say it would have been nice to have your buddies with you, but I would not have traded that for the experience with Mike McCorriston. Unfortunately, he returned after one tour there. He had been accepted in the police department. So in October he (returned to O'ahu). But what I did learn in those three months, I had put to good use. None of the other colonists were skillful in fishing, the type of fishing that Mike did. He and I did a lot of talking in the "Tower" where we stayed. This was a building erected from remnants from the *Amaranth,* a British ship that was wrecked there on the island (in August 1913). Colonists before us brought back planks and things from the *Amaranth* and built the tower. Mike and I spent our time there whereas Ernest Renken and Henry Lee stayed in the government house where the radio was at. (Weather reporting and) maintenance and repairs (of equipment took a small part of the day. So there was a lot of time for talking, fishing, and learning a craft. I still do feather craft today, but no longer make fish nets—no place to fish anymore.)

WN: How did you get the materials to make those nets?

PP: Mike had taken a lot of the stuff (with him on the cruise). Prior to the second cruise I radioed Sol[omon] Kalama who was kind of our contact here. Whatever we needed, Hawaiian salt, fishing equipment, whatever we need, we contacted Sol Kalama.

NK: Was Sol working in an official capacity with a . . .

PP: No, not that I know of. He was just someone who gave of himself to do things for the Panalā'au. Extremely wonderful individual. Like I say, he was our contact. Whatever we needed, aside from the normal government issue, we went to Sol.

WN: So those things would come, things that Sol got together, would come with the supply ship?

PP: Yeah. The families would also send things down. There was no restriction. You took it down to the coast guard headquarters, marked it for whoever it was for, and it would go aboard. No problem at all.

WN: What about food? What kind of food did you have, supplies?

PP: Well, you think in a situation like that that it would be a problem. It wasn't. Number one, there was ample food. More than enough food sent down on every cruise. There was canned *poi*. Cases of it. Saloon Pilot crackers in five-gallon cans. I think they were

made on the Big Island then. The problem, of course, was water. There was ample water brought in on each cruise, but you couldn't use it for anything but drinking. In fact, we seldom used it for cooking because it was better to use water already salted. But food supply: canned fruits, vegetables, plenty. We were fortunate. We had a little refrigerator run by kerosene that kept whatever fresh meats and things for a week or so. It kept things cool, until it went out. But gee, this was a real modern device there, a refrigerator (chuckles). But no, there was never a complaint about the food.

NK: Did other colonists talk about eating the seabirds?

PP: Not that I recall.

NK: Did you ever have occasion where you eat the birds or eggs?

PP: The eggs, yes. The birds, no. I tried it there, and of course, Mike McCorriston is telling us, "Oh, you'll never wanna eat that stuff." The reason is there's nothing to really eat. Just feathers, skin, and bones. Besides they tasted horrible. There was a migratory duck that we tried to eat. Again, there wasn't much to eat on it. Although it had a strong fish taste, it was edible. But they were few and far between. Now, the egg of the sooty tern (bird) is excellent. Comparable to a chicken egg. There were small, maybe half the size of a golf ball. You had to get the egg when the sooty tern first started to nest. The sooty tern would move from field to field. Thousands, and thousands of them. You'd watch and see a field that would move, then when they started to lay, then you went out with a bucket and collected the eggs.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: When you said water was a problem, or water was a potential problem, how did you deal with that?

PP: Well, it was brought in fifty-five gallon drums that after a while picked up the taste of metal, or whatever had been in the drum. (There was no rationing), but you had to be extremely careful because you didn't know how long it would have to last. Sure, we could expect the coast guard cutter in another three months or so to bring another supply of water, but there was (always the thought of what if. . . ?) Although there was very little, if any rainfall on the island, a rain shed had been built. A huge galvanized iron shed that was intended to collect rainwater and store it in a thousand-gallon tank. (I don't think the water was ever) used for drinking because of the droppings from birds (on the roof). When they initially tried to plant coconut trees, *hau* trees, and such things

on the island, this water was probably used for that purpose. Besides, it rained so seldom that you could not depend on the weather. You could have a day when storm clouds approaching the islands would split before reaching land. The heat, convection currents, would divide the clouds, and they'd proceed on both sides of the island. Rain like mad, but not a drop on land.

There's one story I like to tell. When you had rainfall, which again was seldom, it would normally be late at night or early morning when the island was cool. The first rainfall that we had, everyone rushes out to get a freshwater shower. Now, as a rookie, I went out with soap, and I really soaped myself down. Then rain stops. There is nothing more uncomfortable than to have soap dry on your body, or try to get it off with salt water. Mike McCorriston and the guys were aware of what was happening, and thought it was extremely funny to see me out there soaping down, and then the rain stops.

(Laughter)

WN: Otherwise, you folks took baths in the salt water?

PP: Salt water. There's nothing else.

WN: Did you have salt water soap?

PP: Yeah, but that stuff would take the skin right off of you. That was powerful stuff. I don't know what the soap was going to do because you'd still be covered with salt when you came out. (Laughs) I think that was one of the most difficult things to adjust to, not being able to take a freshwater bath or shower. But it took me a month or more before I started to feel that this is not too bad. You get used to it.

WN: What kind of dishes did you folks cook?

PP: Well, everyone had their own specialty. You cooked one day out of four and rotated just like firemen do. Entirely up to you. No one told you what to cook or how to cook it. You're on your own. If you needed help, you asked for it. If someone knew what you wanted to prepare, they helped you. Otherwise, you were on your own. It's safe to say that fish and or lobster was almost a daily fare. Then you augmented that with, of course, the rice, the *poi,* and canned vegetables. The food wasn't bad at all. I guess I was fortunate that the other three colonists were better cooks than I. (Laughs) I was [once] a boy scout (and learned to cook), but I was never really a chef of any kind. I managed though.

NK: So what kind of fish?

PP: Well, the staple on Jarvis was *āholehole*. The water would be black with *āholehole* and one of the throw nets would net hundreds. This is the fish that we dried to send home to the families in the five-gallon Saloon Pilot cracker cans. I imagine you can put 200 fish in each can really packed down. But there was also a lot of other fish. The mullet was great. A lot of red snapper, (but not safe to eat because of) phosphorus they ate, and were extremely poisonous. *Pāpio*, abundant.

Of course, lobster. Absolutely unbelievable. At the end of the first cruise, when the coast guard cutter arrived, they sent a team ashore for maintenance of equipment. That night the four of us, each with a gas lantern and two or three of the seamen, picked enough lobster I think to feed the entire ship's complement. That's how plentiful they were. You walked out when the tide was low, below your knees. You're inside a barrier reef, so the water is like glass when it's calm. From the light of the glass lantern, the lobster would just sit. They wouldn't move. You reached down with your glove and picked them up. It didn't take long to really load up.

WN: Could you preserve lobster like how you preserve fish?

PP: If you could, I didn't know it. I had asked my mother to send some kind of sauce for the lobster. So she sent down some kind of a mayonnaise sauce. It was absolutely delicious. Two half gallons. I made the mistake, a fatal mistake, I brought the sauce out the night the coast guard sailors were ashore. Needless to say, I had no (chuckles) sauce left for lobster after that.

NK: What about *ulua?*

PP: I don't remember any of us catching an *ulua*. *Pāpio,* yes.

NK: Because, you know, on Howland, there's all those pictures of those big *ulua*. Maybe it was just Howland.

PP: I don't think we even tried, because to me a *pāpio* is far more flavorful than a big *ulua*.

WN: Did you have a problem with sharks?

PP: Oh yeah. Well, not a problem per se. No problem if you stayed away from the channel. The channel was actually the only access to the island because of the barrier reef. Originally, I understand that they had to use demolition to create the channel to get in. It could be extremely dangerous, particularly at high surf when where the water would come in over the barrier reef and get trapped and the only outlet would be through the channel. The water in the channel, on occasion, would be a foot higher than on the sides because of the way the water would rush to get out through this one opening.

Now there, we caught a shark thirteen feet, nine inches long (in the channel). I didn't even know I had a shark on the line, until it got to the shore. It just seemed to come with the hook. As soon as it got to the shore, it put up a tremendous fight. But by then, three of us there holding onto the line, kept him out of the water. I'm sure (if he got back into deep water) he'd probably pull all of us in. I have pictures somewhere. I hope I can find them. It took me about a month to clean the jaws. That also was left on the island. Most of everything I had was left on the island when we were evacuated. That was one of the things that I wanted that to take home and say, "See, I fought this guy."

NK: The initial colonists, they had to keep a daily log. They did weather reports, I think, four times a day. Now, you said you guys did weather reports two times a day. What was some of your other daily tasks, and then how often did you have to radio in?

PP: The surface weather reports, we took almost continuously. But the important weather report (was the winds aloft balloon readings). This was to measure the velocity and direction of the winds aloft. This was taken at ten o'clock in the morning, and ten o'clock in the evening. At various periods during the day, you took surface winds, wet- and dry-bulb readings, surface temperatures, and that sort of thing. But the big ones were the balloon readings at ten o'clock in the morning and ten o'clock in the evening. These were consolidated and sent to the coast guard station at Wailupe on O'ahu. You remember the coast guard radio stations there?

WN: Here?

PP: On O'ahu, going out towards 'Āina Haina, (there is a fire station there now). That was the [U.S.] Coast Guard station for the Pacific. Wailupe. That, of course, is since gone. But that was our contact here.

NK: How often did you radio in?

PP: Just once. Once in the evening.

NK: Did you keep a daily log? An official one?

PP: No, we were not asked to. I know the original colonists were required to keep a log. No, the only thing that I did wasn't required. I did some banding of birds. When my brother, Woody, went down (on his last tour on Jarvis), I'm sure it was Dr. [E.H.] Bryan, [Jr.] (he worked with him to record the movements of) migratory birds. You put a band on (a type of bird), then recorded the number, the date, the type of bird, the conditions, and so on. I know Woody brought his log back with him to the Bishop Museum, and I'm sure that is here somewhere. He left the banding and a log with me, which I continued, but unfortunately was left on Jarvis when we were evacuated (in February 1942). But I did continue the banding and that was the only thing I did in an official capacity.

NK: Were you concerned at all about increasing tensions in the Pacific? Were you guys monitoring world events?

PP: No, not really. We had no radios to monitor news broadcasts. What we got would be through contact with Kenny Lum-King (on his amateur radio). But then we weren't discussing world situations. We were talking with our family. None of us were aware of the increased tensions in the Pacific.

NK: But were you able to communicate with the other islands?

PP: On occasion. Yes. We made contact with Howland Island, but only on the amateur radio. I think Tom Bederman had a ham radio on Howland. [Thomas Bederman was on Howland and Canton between June 1939 and January 1942.] But (not to exchange war information).

NK: Should we move in another direction or is there any other question? So why don't we talk a little bit about how you found out that the war broke out, and kind of what happened.

PP: I think that is kind of interesting. Our radios had gone out just prior to December 7, 1941, (and we had no way to know of) the attack on Pearl Harbor. When we did get the radio operating again a few days later, we were informed that Pearl Harbor had been attacked and we're at war with Japan. We were to stay off the radio, maintain absolute radio silence. No contact at all. That was our last contact with the outside world until February of 1942. Never heard another voice, never spoke to another person except the other three colonists on the island. That was it.

Fortunately, our radios came back when they did, because some days later, Ernest Renken, one of the colonists on [Jarvis] Island, and I got up fairly early in the morning, and saw this ship offshore. Not knowing whether it was friend or foe, we got the other two guys up, and moved across the island. One thing we had already done, we had taken supplies, water, some food stuff, and buried it near the wreck of the *Amaranth*. There was a monument there so we knew where it was located. When it got light enough, it turned out to be a Japanese submarine. They started to shell the island. Fortunately, their attack was directed at what we called the salt flats. This is an area that had been extensively mined for guano during the late 1800s, and brackish water seeped into the area. When it was dry, it looked like a huge cement airfield that you could land an aircraft on. I'm not sure how many shells they lobbed in there.

NK: So they didn't aim at the government building?

PP: No. But following the attack, we stayed across the island for the entire day, then went back to camp at night. Extremely cautious. But the camp was in good shape. Provisions

were there. We were concerned about water. Knowing now that there was war on, we know we're not going to get any supplies. We had no further attacks on the island, although we were extremely careful. No lights during the evenings or any of this sort of stuff. (Then in February), we saw these two ships come over the horizon. One was a warship, the other was a freighter.

WN: Japanese?

PP: We didn't know. The warship was painted battleship gray. As she got fairly close, she did look like it could be the *Roger B. Taney*. I guess when the war started, she was refitted and painted battleship gray. (Not being sure and) thinking maybe this could be (another attack or) an invasion, we moved across the island as fast as we could. I like to tell the story that we were prepared (to repel the) invasion with the .22 rifle that my brother left and a set of bow and arrows.

(Laughter)

PP: While we were there, the warship circled the island. She looked enough like the *Taney* that we felt we should take a chance (and return to camp). We were down on the beach, and as soon as the *Taney* saw us, they put a boat over the side and came in to take us off the island. When the coast guard hit the beach, in just a matter of minutes, we were off the island and onto the *Taney*. Probably the most beautiful sight in the world: seeing the four colonists from Enderbury Island that the *Taney* had already picked up. So to see these four guys, just beautiful.

WN: Who were the four? Do you remember?

PP: Yeah. Joe [Joseph] Kepoʻo. David Hartwell (leader on the island), Jimmy Bruhn, and Jimmy Riley. [According to *Panalāʻau Memoirs,* David Hartwell as listed to be on Jarvis on February 1942. PP disputes this information.] We were taken aboard the *Roger B. Taney* to Palmyra Island.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

NK: Before we get to Palmyra, from the point when the island was attacked to when you were picked up was a good seven weeks?

PP: At least seven weeks.

NK: So what in the world were you thinking? Did you think they forgot about you guys? That they thought you were dead, and they weren't going to come and get you?

PP: We just didn't know what to think. There's a war on. How bad the war is going, what the conditions were, we had no idea. So we were kind of resigned to spend a lot of time

on that island. Why would the United States risk a ship, to pick up four native Hawaiians? That kind of stuff seems kind of ridiculous. But they did. I don't know why the *Taney* was in the area there or why she was escorting (the *Barbara Olsen*. But we were eternally grateful.) We did find out after we got aboard that the *Taney* that she was going to circle the island, and if they saw no sign of life, they were going to shell the island and depart. So it was extremely fortunate that we elected to get back across the island and show ourselves.

NK: Did you guys sleep in the government quarters or were you afraid that the government quarters might be susceptible to attack?

PP: Well, for a while we slept out. After about a week, we felt, "Well, they're not coming back." If they really wanted to, they could've destroyed the camp at any time. So then we got back into the government house, and then stayed there. But extremely cautious. No further attacks after that.

NK: Did you guys rotate a watchman to look out?

PP: No, not really. There was no one designated, "Okay, your turn for duty outside. Go look for boats or planes." No, didn't.

WN: So were you more or less in fear? Were you on edge every day for those seven weeks?

PP: Well, more at night, because during the day you could watch the horizon for 360 degrees. In fact, I never saw another ship or aircraft the entire time I was on the island. But it seemed that after a while, after maybe (a week or two), you just kind of calmed down and took things as it came. No real apprehension after that, except when we saw the two ships (*Taney* and freighter) coming over the horizon. Then stark fear.

WN: You knew the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

PP: That's all we knew.

WN: That's all you knew, so what went through your mind? Did you ever wonder why the Japanese would want to use some of their efforts on this small island?

PP: Yes. Like why the attack on Pearl Harbor? We hadn't been keeping up with the political situation in the world and the tension between Japan and the United States. I thought we were on good terms with Japan. Why an attack by Japan? It's inconceivable. But what was even worse was the fact that we knew not what happened to our family. What conditions were like here? How badly was the island [i.e., O'ahu] hit? Were any members of our family in danger, killed, injured? Any of this. This was our biggest fear,

I think, not knowing. Not knowing what was going on throughout the world, particularly here on O'ahu where our families were. That was our biggest concern.

WN: Now, at night, were you aware of your lanterns and things like that? Did you tone it down?

PP: We didn't use lanterns at all at night. That was one thing we did. As young as we were and inexperienced, we decided if we had no lights, no radios going, receivers or transmitters, there'd be no way for incoming aircraft or ships (to hone in on the island).

WN: You guys blacked out, too, just like O'ahu.

PP: Blacked out (chuckles). On occasions, we closed up the government house and used lanterns. Other than that, nowhere in the kitchen or in the tower. They were wide open.

WN: Now, if they were going to attack, did you ever wonder how they were going to attack? Was it going to be shelling, or is it going to be coming on the island, or anything like that?

PP: I had no idea in the world. Why would anyone want to attack the island? Why would anyone want an island that size? (Laughs) Nothing there. Absolutely nothing.

WN: You guys were on it.

PP: Yes, well, we were on a mission. But as far as any economic or commercial value, absolutely nothing. Of course, (we never considered they might be of some military value).

NK: Now, is this something that you've come to realize or did it occur to you on the island at the time that you realized there wasn't any commercial viability to the island?

PP: No, no idea. As far as we were concerned, we were going down there because they we need people to take weather reports and to keep possession of the islands for the United States. That's all we were concerned about.

WN: When you said a shelling occurred targeting the salt flats, was there a safe side of the island and a not-safe side of the island? You said once that you had to go to the other side of the island.

PP: Only because it was away from camp. There was no safe side, unsafe side. It's all the same. The only reason we went (across the island) was because we thought the camp would be the target. If there was going to be an attack, it would be on the camp. So as far away as we could get from the camp, we thought we'd be relatively safe, and that was the only reason.

WN: Was the camp near the side where the channel was?

PP: Right directly in front of it. That was the only way, at that time of the year, the winter months, that you could get in to make a landing would be through that channel. We had channel markers that marked the channel for the coast guard ships to come in. We took those down, of course. When it was rough, (because of the barrier reef), unless you knew exactly where that channel was, and what to look for, you would never be able to land a ship on that island. It was that bad. But of course, during good weather, it was like glass.

WN: So obviously, you did think about maybe the possibility of hand-to-hand combat since you had bows and arrows.

PP: No. I don't think we'd ever come to that because if there were an invasion, it would be numbers. It wouldn't be just four guys coming ashore. It would be numbers, and they'd have superior weapons. It'd just be unrealistic to even think. I was just joking about trying to defend the island with the .22 rifle, bow and arrow, of course.

NK: On the day of your rescue, you mentioned that they hardly gave you any time to gather up your things. Literally, what were you allowed to do, as soon as you realized it was the *Taney*. Did they launch a boat out to come pick you guys up?

PP: (When we realized it could be the *Taney*), we moved pretty fast to get back to camp. We were more concerned to signal our existence, then worry about what we were going to take home with us. In fact, I don't think that dawned on anyone until a boat came ashore and we were told to get aboard. Then it was too late to go back and collect things to take with us. So very little, if anything, was I able to bring back.

WN: So what was important to you to take back?

PP: Well, I think some of my crafts. I had learned, and I got pretty good at making feather *lei*. I had one that I had sent home earlier. Crude, but very attractive. The shark jaws that I worked on so long and so hard, I wanted to bring home and show off. That was it. I was able to get off with a pair of slacks, rubber shoes, T-shirt, and a sailor cap. That's about all that I could grab.

NK: The one feather *lei*.

PP: No, that I had sent home on the cruise before. I wanted my family to see how intelligent I was to be able to sew a feather *lei*. So I sent that one home. So that's why it's here today.

NK: Now, once you were on the *Taney,* is that when you learned the fate of Howland and Baker?

PP: Yes. Although we didn't get as much information as we would like, what we did get was most revealing. (Everything considered, I would say that we were fortunate that only two of sixteen Panalāʻau were killed or injured. It could have been a complete disaster.) So gotta give thanks for the United States coming through to take the guys off of each of the islands. That's quite an accomplishment (under the wartime conditions).

WN: Did you ever find out later on what was some of the rationale? I've never thought of this before, but just the thought, chaos of war, and somebody saying, "Hey, wait a minute. We've got these four guys on this island." I'm just wondering did any of your parents make any kind of an appeal to the government?

PP: Of course. My dad, particularly, at least once a week, would call the coast guard headquarters for any word. Of course, they wouldn't give out anything. These were the early stages of the war. No. They don't know anything yet. And that's as much as our parents got from the coast guard or any of the authorities.

(But anyway, from Jarvis, the *Taney* took us) to Palmyra and we were put ashore. The military was building a resupply depot was on Palmyra. Then the coast guard cutter departed. We were put aboard the freighter *Barbara Olsen* and eventually made it back to Honolulu. That was probably the scariest part of the trip. Aboard this freighter, unescorted, going all of eight knots, heading back to Honolulu. It must have taken three or four days at least to get back to the islands.

That was the conclusion to the Panalāʻau project. Absolutely nothing. Not even a thank you. Go to heck or anything. "That's it, the project is over, your money is deposited in the bank. Good luck." They did give us that one piece of advice, however, and that was: "Get yourself a job within ten days or two weeks, or you'll be inducted into the military." That was our thanks from the officials.

NK: When the freighter pulled up into Honolulu Harbor, did it just let you off on a pier? Were there are family members waiting?

PP: No, no one. Absolutely no one, except the government officials and coast guard officials.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 38-13-1-02; SIDE ONE

PP: That's it. That's the conclusion to the Panalāʻau project.

WN: A few more questions.

NK: Where did you leave off? You were talking about being dropped off in Honolulu Harbor.

PP: Yeah, with no one there to greet us. That was it.

NK: Did they take you to the office so you could call your family?

PP: No, I walked up from the waterfront to Liberty House (where my dad worked), and walked in on my dad who almost had a heart attack. He turned around, and there I was with a beard, and long hair, just standing there.

WN: Did you feel relief when you got into Honolulu?

PP: Oh, of course, (although it was difficult to adjust to the war conditions here). Here, back home. But a little humor. Before I left for the islands, I had an eight-and-a-half-foot solid redwood plank surfboard. I used to carry that board from my home on 6th Avenue and Ho'olulu Street, down the hill to Kimo Boyd's house (on Wainam Avenue). He and I would carry the board to what is now Kūhiō Beach, in front of then the Waikīkī Tavern. This is where we practically lived during the summer. Then in the afternoon, we would carry that board back up to Kimo's house. I would then have to carry it the rest of the way up the hill by myself.

When I got home from Jarvis, my dad had dug a bomb shelter in the backyard. Everyone had bomb shelters. But he main support for the shelter was my redwood surfboard on the roof covered with rocks, sand. (Chuckles) My precious redwood surfboard had become a part of the bomb shelter and war effort.

NK: Did the Panalā'au colonists get together? You came back under very harrowing circumstances. Two of your companions had been killed on Howland. Was there any coming together of the colonists to pay tribute to your fallen comrades to kind of celebrate having come back alive together?

PP: Well, yes, (but not for some years after the war ended). Admiral [Frank] Kenner, who was commander of the *Roger B. Taney* on several cruises and was promoted during the war to admiral in the coast guard, [Kenner also once served as commander on the *Itasca*], hosted the one Panalā'au reunion that I recall. That was the only one that I attended. But I don't recall any other ceremony prior to that. (It was difficult getting together during the war years.) But I think, if I'm not mistaken, at the reunion, is where we started the Hui Panalā'au Foundation. I know Admiral Kenner was most supportive of this. But as the years went on, it seems everyone's kind of drifted apart. After a while, no one heard of the Panalā'au. It was just something that was forgotten. If it wasn't for the Bishop Museum, of course, this lovely lady here [Noelle Kahanu], resurrecting this project, it would probably forever remain in the archives of Hawai'i.

NK: Can you talk a little bit about the difference in homecoming for the men who came back from Howland and Baker versus the very last cruise which was your cruise. Howland and Baker, there was a *Life* magazine article, "Howland Island Rescue." There was, I think, *Honolulu Advertiser* coverage. Was there any coverage for your return?

PP: No. In fact, this is one of the reasons I refer to the colonists from Enderbury and Jarvis as "the forgotten eight." Up to and including Burl Burlingame's articles last year [*Honolulu Star-Bulletin,* April 28–29, 2002], excellent articles, but he, nor anyone else, has ever told the complete story. He never mentioned the rescue of colonists on Enderbury or Jarvis Island. In fact, I think he has a line in there that said that they had already been removed, when in fact, we were still on the island. There has never been any mention of the forgotten eight, how and when they were rescued and eventually returned to Honolulu, or how the project finally ended. Granted there's a war on and everything had to be classified. (I'm sure the officials couldn't be bothered with eight colonists who had been left on some remote islands. After all, they were just native Hawaiians!) I have a picture of (the eight colonists on the *Barbara* Olsen on the return from Palmyra to Honolulu. It is) the only photograph in the existence of the eight colonists together. Sadly today, I'm the only surviving member of "the forgotten eight."

NK: So reflecting on this chapter in your life, how do you feel about it? Not only your time there, but how it ended. What do you feel about the federal government's role or responsibility toward the forgotten eight of you?

PP: Well, I feel very strongly about the fact that [after] more than sixty years, the federal government has never formally acknowledged the Panalāʻau or the contributions and sacrifices made by the colonists in the service of our country. Absolutely nothing. The territory of Hawaiʻi, and the state of Hawaiʻi have done no better. They have done absolutely nothing. This year our governor proclaimed May 25th as Panalāʻau Day, but no one knows about it. To my knowledge, that's the only thing that the state of Hawaiʻi has done for their own. Of course, the federal government has done even less. The families of the two boys that were killed on Howland Island, Joe Keliʻihananui, and Dickie Whaley, have received absolutely nothing from the government. No compensation in any way whatsoever. I feel strongly about this and also the fact that when the remains of the two boys from Howland were returned to Oʻahu in 1954, they were buried in a remote cemetery out in Schofield Barracks. That's where they remain today. That is one of the issues we discussed in a meeting with Congressman Abercrombie, the reburial of the remains in a state or national cemetery. Now this was promised to the family many years earlier. All the families request is that they be reburied in a cemetery accessible to the families. These are some of the things that I feel strongly about. [On December 8, 2003, the remains of Keliʻihananui and Whaley were moved from the cemetery at Schofield Barracks to the Hawaiʻi State Veterans Cemetery in Kāneʻohe.]

I feel the colonists were used and betrayed by our government. (Our government knew there would eventually be a conflict with Japan—just a matter of when. The secretary of the interior in 1940, recommended the colonists be removed from the islands, they being no further economic value. The secretary of the navy wanted to retain the islands for possible military value. Already in September of 1941, all ship movements were classified—another indicator that war was imminent. That was the time all colonists should have been evacuated, because there was not further reason for them to be on the islands.)

WN: That's part of the story, I think.

PP: I don't know if any of the other colonists feel the same way I do. (I have never discussed the issue with any of them.) But I have always felt that way (but more so the past few years after reading declassified documents concerning the project). The colonists should have been removed from the islands long before the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

WN: What started out as an adventure ended up as a life-threatening ordeal.

PP: Yes, it did.

WN: Okay. Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate it.

PP: I can't think of anything else that I could add to this.

WN: Thank you.

NK: Thank you, Paul.

END OF INTERVIEW

# HUI PANALĀʻAU:
## Hawaiian Colonists in the Pacific, 1935–1942

**Center for Oral History**
**Social Science Research Institute**
**University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa**

**July 2006**